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## USDA recognises Indian accreditation as sufficient for NOP

Indian certification bodies (CBs) were recently sent a letter from their accreditation body, APEDA. In it they were informed that the US Department of Agriculture's Agriculture Marketing Service (AMS) has recognised APEDA's conformity assessment system for the accreditation of organic certification bodies to be sufficient to ensure conformity with the technical standards for the National Organic Program (NOP).

The eleven CBs accredited by APEDA in India are now eligible to issue certificates for NOP alongside the Indian National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP). The USDA letter was included with the letter that APEDA sent to the Indian CBs. It stated that the USDA AMS recognises that the India Organic seal can be affixed along with the USDA organic seal on products and certifications issued by the CBs accredited by APEDA, for products destined for export to the USA.

CBs were advised by APEDA to prepare separate checklists to conduct NOP audits and were informed of a pending on-site audit by a USDA representative. The Indian CB that contacted TOS described the develop-

ment as totally unexpected and contrary to all information they have received earlier. Could the surprising recognition be part and parcel of the friendly foreign policy position the US government is currently taking towards India as a strategic regional partner country?

In any case, the good news may put some CBs in India in a quandary. The majority are country offices of international foreign CBs with head offices in Europe or USA. These CBs are already directly accredited by USDA. The USDA recognition of APEDA accredited CBs in India appears to be free, at least no additional charge or fee was mentioned in the APEDA letter. Indian operators will presumably expect lower charges for NOP certification in India. Indian based CBs with foreign head offices may face the dilemma of having to offer a cheaper certification according to the Indian system (NPOP) and NOP against certification through their respective head offices as is the current practice.

Let's wait and see. ■

*Ong Kung Wai  
Kungwai@tm.net.my*

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